



GOVERNOR'S OFFICE *of* PROGRAMS *and* PLANNING

**JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM ACT IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION**

March 16, 2021

Via Videoconference

**Members in Attendance:**

Bridget Denicola

Tracie Woods

Gina Womack

James Lemoine

Justice Elect Piper Griffin

Representative Royce Duplessis

Richard Pittman

**Call to Order:**

The meeting came to order at 2:04 p.m.

**Black Girls Rising-Kassidy Ison**

Kassidy Ison expressed warm remarks about Families and Friends of Louisiana's Children and the support that was provided to her and her brother.

**Department of Education-Dr. Cade Brumley**

Dr. Brumley stated he was extremely proud of the work being done across the state to keep schools open. Stated there are about 70% of our state's children who are receiving face to face instruction. Additionally, students also have the ability to remain fully virtual, if they have a need or prefer to do so.

Ms. Womack highlighted that in 2003 when the reform was passed it set up a juvenile justice and education partnership. She expressed that the commission is extremely interested in the communication that's suppose to occur between educational systems and juvenile justice agencies. Additionally, she expressed a desire to understand what BESE's role is in revising the student discipline codes, to remove more explicit zero tolerance mandates.

Dr. Brumley stated school systems across the state are following statute in terms of how to deal with discipline laws. He stated that there are ways in which systems are dealing with discipline issues, some of which include positive approaches that aren't in statute, but that school systems are trying to employ everyday that aren't necessarily mandated. He mentioned that most administrators are working through statutes passed by legislators, that are then placed in their local policies. He is happy to hear the commission's thoughts and feedback on any areas that can be improved.

Richard Pittman stated that a rather higher percentage of all delinquency cases in the public defender's system came out of school settings. Half of those cases were for disturbing the peace or simple battery. Noted that a significant amount of these cases, were represented by black children. He shared that a high concentration of disturbing the peace cases occurred between July 2020 and December 30, 2020 in Caddo parish. More than one out of every three disturbing the peace cases came from that parish, but the reason is still unknown.

Dr. Brumley stated that in his previous role as a district superintendent, they decided to move away from out of school suspensions. In instances that qualified for this type of action, his team instead suspended to a district site that was a rehab and counseling type center for a specific amount of time. This allowed students to maintain their attendance, assignments and get the specific intervention of support needed to be successful. Asked Ricard to share where concentrations of these incidences are occurring so he can take a further look.

Ms. Womack asked for more information on how BESE is ensuring that every school provides training for teachers, that supports positive intervention. Dr. Brumley stated that since legislation charges BESE with oversight, he would have to look at it. Asked that information is sent to him for any particulars the commission would like done and any insight the commission has.

Ms. Womack will generate questions to send to the commission to add/vet and then she will send those questions to Dr. Brumley.

Representative Duplessis asked about trauma informed care as far as where we were, where we are now and where we would like to go. Additionally, he wanted to know the role of the Department of Education in addressing and dealing with these matters and not allowing kids to get in secure care. Dr. Brumley stated the department could continue to break down barriers, so external providers can. Additionally, Dr. Kelli Peterson stated that the department is working with Ochsner to provide mental health support to educators to span not just during regular hours but also during off hours. Additionally, the department works with LSU'S social work department to make sure they provide additional supports within 12 systems. The department has a listing of schools in need of intervention due to their high rates or discipline referrals and suspensions. Those schools are taking part in a social emotional learning an academic integration pilot. It is an SEL academy helping to train educators and leaders in those schools on things like understanding emotions, showing empathy etc. Additionally, systems can now use some of the stimulus funds coming from the federal government to have social workers and counselors, due to the impact the pandemic is having on mental health.

Ms. Womack suggested that JJRAIC set up committees to work with various state holders to ensure we are tackling these issues from the local levels all the way up to the state to ensure accountability and better communication.

Dr. Brumley wanted to ensure that the commission knew that currently Louisiana only has 4 out of 10 kids coming to kindergarten on day one with the skills needed to be successful on day one. He stated that until we invest in not just the quantity but also the quality of seats in early childhood, we will not see the shifts/transformation we want. He stressed the importance of investment in early childhood. Also stated that there if you're a student in Louisiana there is a 60% that your teacher would be a white woman. He expressed the need for more representation of teachers in our school system and highlighted that there is only a 5% chance that a student's teacher would be an African American male. He continued to express the importance of having African American male teachers and the impacts representation can have on young black boys in grades 3 to 8. He, asked for specific support in this area from the commission.

### **Children's Cabinet- Dr. Dana Hunter**

#### **Human Trafficking**

Dr. Hunter stated that childhood hunger was extremely high when she first started in her position and that this was of heightened concern for the Governor and the First Lady. Mentioned that our state was one of eight states awarded a grant to address technology issues that impeded on childhood hunger in 2017. From those resources, they were able to implement a state specific plan in July of 2017 and in September 2017 they created No Kid Hungry. One goal of No Kid Hungry was to launch the implementation of a state specific plan- which included getting our

state to 100% community eligibility (this rule stated that all kids could eat for free regardless of applications). Louisiana was able to get 98% to adopt the community eligibility rule.

Additional goals of No Kid Hungry was increasing school breakfast participation, have a targeted focus on delta regions in North Louisiana, and ensure that kids had access to food in aftercare and during the summer months. Two years after this implementation, there was an increase in over 1 million meals and an increase in sponsors of summer school programs.

Dr. Hunter went on to describe the work being done around Human Trafficking. In 2017 there was Human Trafficking which provided information on children, youth and adults impacted by this issue. Over 700 key service providers participated. In 2018, the department applied for a grant from the United States Department of Justice. The grant would be used to improve outcomes of children and youth who were trafficked. Louisiana became the only state in the country to receive this award. The initiative was launched in January 2019 and through the initiative eight regional coordinators were hired across the state, to serve as key contacts/experts to service providers in their specific regions. The name of the initiative is: The Louisiana Child and Youth Human Trafficking Collaborative

### **Children's Cabinet Advisory Board (CCAB)**

The Children's Cabinet Advisory Board works on the following issues: Supporting for early Intervention, working with DCFS on foster care issues and raising the age for foster care children etc. Currently, her department is working towards implementing an objective screening tool to see if a juvenile should be detained and is supporting DOE and LDH on Project Aware. Project Aware helps to increase the number of mental health professionals in K-12 schools.

Additionally, Dr. Hunter is working with Senator Barrow on bill (SB128), this bill was introduced last year but postponed due to COVID. The legislation would require certain assessments and screenings for children in schools that are being recommended for suspension. Instead of suspending students, the legislation would require school personnel to give them a screening for ACEs and trauma.

CCAB also made a recommendation for a statewide Perinatal Consultation Program, which would allow physicians and other health professions to screen families early on, to see what specific needs are needed prior to the child being born. This will help to apply wrap-around services for families prior to the birth of a child.

Ms. Womack asked about how to include Children Youth Planning Board to coordinate services. Dr. Hunter stated that when the legislation first went into effect there was a grant, however after funding was depleted those boards slowly went away because they could no longer function. Last year, an assessment was sent to all the existing boards to understand how they are currently operating and how they were able to stay in place. Many stated they had a dedicated staff and an Executive Director. Areas had funding, continued to function, however CYPBs that were not funded, stated they didn't have the capacity to do so. Dr. Hunter asked if JJRAIC could develop a plan to fund these boards and then present it to the legislature and the Governor.

### **Ms. Robin Simmons-Personal Testimony**

Shared a personal family story of the impacts solitary confinement has on juveniles and is advocating for the stopping of this practice in Juvenile centers across the state of Louisiana. Her adopted grand-son, Solan Peterson, took his life during solitary confinement in a juvenile center in Shreveport, La, he was 13 years old at the time. He was to be released the next day. Two days later another teen committed suicide, at the same facility. She asked the commission to investigate this matter.

### **Rachel Gassert- Policy Director of the Louisiana Center for Children's Rights**

Stated that Louisiana has made some improvements on the issues of solitary confinement on children, when compared to adults. She mentioned adults could be sent to solitary confinement for days, months and even years. In juvenile detentions, there are limitations on solitary confinement. These facilities are all required to have licensing

by DCFS. As it related to Solan's facility, there were many deficiencies that were found at the facility. The facility was afforded to correct the issues and continue its operations. The maximum amount of time a child can be held in solitary confinement in these facilities is 72 hours. She stated that she believes that many legislative actions can occur to address these issues. The national standard is that room confinement should always be voluntary. In the case of involuntary room confinement the practice should just be used until the juvenile calm down, after this happens he/she should be immediately returned to the general community.

Ms. Gassert stated she was extremely concerned with what is occurring as it relates to room confinement due to COVID and that she has no knowledge of what has happened in local detentions due to health precautions. She also expressed that licensing standards do not apply to OJJ, as they have their own internal policies.

#### **Deputy Secretary Bill Sommers- Office of Juvenile Justice**

Deputy Secretary Sommers stated solitary confinement is not a good thing and their best practice is not utilizing solitary confinement and mentioned that children are checked on regularly. He stated that there is a behavior unit that he hopes to do away with. He also mentioned that three of their social workers would attend TBRI-trainings so they understand trauma and can become practitioners. This training will be done throughout the state to both their nonsecure and secure sites so every probation officer will be TBRI trained in the years to come. Mr. Sommers also stated on this Saturday and Sunday, OJJ is opening visitation for secure care after almost a year. When asked if a new facility is being built, Mr. Sommers stated that although a new facility has not broken ground, bonds have been sold for a rebuild of one of the facilities, but that he would notify the commission immediately when this happened.

Representative Duplessis asked if there would be any benefit to reintroduce Senator's Gatti's expired bill.

Ms. Gassert, stated some amendments should be made if it is introduced and that this commission should oversee and lead the study.

Representative Duplessis stated he or Ms. Womack would forward the report sent to him, to the entire commission.

Discussion was made on having a tour of Bridge City Center or the Swanson Center. A poll will be sent to commission members to see which day works best, in addition to another poll to plan the next JJRAIC meeting.

#### **Closing Remarks**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:11 p.m.

A live recording of the meeting can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fedw7R5hay4&t=1871s>